



Inside Congress

by United States Representative George R. Nethercutt, Jr.

For the week ending November 22, 2002

Welcome to this week's edition of Inside Congress. I am glad to share with you a little of my work in the national legislature. Please follow the listed links or contact my office for more information on the topics mentioned here.

CONGRESS APPROVES MAJOR INCREASE IN FUNDING TO FIGHT DIABETES

This week the Senate agreed to legislation I helped craft in the House to provide \$1.5 billion over the next five years for diabetes research, prevention and treatment. H.R. 5738 will provide \$750 million for type 1 (juvenile) diabetes research at the Department of Health and Human Services. Type 1 diabetes can occur at any age, but is most commonly diagnosed before age 30; today, it afflicts more than 1 million Americans.

Diabetes is reaching epidemic proportions among Native Americans, who suffer from two and a half times the incidence of diabetes as Caucasians.

That's why Congress has agreed to increase funding by 50 percent, to \$750 million, to improve prevention and treatment of the disease among Native Americans through the Special Diabetes Program for Indians.

On average, at least one in ten Native Americans is receiving diabetes treatment from the Indian Health Service. In some areas of the country, nearly 25 percent of Native Americans are living with this disease, which puts a tremendous strain on families, tribes, and on the tribal health care system.

According to the National Institutes of Health, the financial impact of treating diabetes, in all its forms, accounts for \$98 billion in health care costs in the U.S. on an annual basis - and represents approximately 25 percent of all Medicare expenditures.

This program provides funding to the Indian Health Service (IHS), which in turn awards grants to American Indian/Alaska Native tribes, clinics, and other organizations to prevent and treat diabetes among their populations. Grant awards have been used in several ways, including the development and enhancement of diabetes programs that utilize traditional cultural methods; the creation, improvement, and augmentation of diabetes care provider teams; and the establishment and improvement of local diabetes clinics.

These funds improve the flexibility for communities to provide the services most needed to prevent and treat diabetes.

UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS SHOULD BE EXTENDED PAST CHRISTMAS

This week I signed a letter with my colleagues in the Washington state congressional delegation asking Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert to bring up Senate legislation that would extend unemployment compensation to laid-off workers for an additional three months, until March 29, 2003. Last week, the House passed, and I supported, legislation that would extend the benefits through January 2003.

However, despite our strong support, as of Friday night the House and Senate could not agree on how long benefits should be extended. I am deeply disappointed that congressional leaders could not reach a compromise to help the 800,000 families whose benefits will end on Dec. 28. Washington State has one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation, and is continuing to feel the effects of slack consumer confidence and demand. I believe these families need the reassurance of a safety net, especially during the winter holidays.

I will continue to support an extension of benefits to help families get through the winter, and will urge congressional leaders to make this item a priority when Congress convenes its next session in January.

PROTECTING AMERICANS FROM PRYING GOVERNMENT EYES

My office has received many calls recently from constituents who are concerned over reports that the Homeland Security Act gives too much authority to the federal government to snoop on American citizens.

The bill establishes an Office for Information Analysis and Infrastructure Protection whose responsibility is to "access, receive and analyze law enforcement information, intelligence information, and other information from agencies of the Federal Government, State and local government agencies (including law enforcement agencies)" to identify, assess, detect and understand terrorist threats. The focus of this office is on "terrorist threats to the homeland" and not spying on citizens.

The provision attempts to address the difficulty our law enforcement and intelligence agencies have in sharing relevant data by establishing a central clearinghouse. However, any data collected is still subject to Fourth Amendment protections on search and seizure - wiretaps and other methods of data collection on U.S. citizens require a warrant.

I want to reassure you that I will be following the implementation of the new Department of Homeland Security closely to make sure it does not overreach when it comes to gathering information on U.S. citizens. I am a strong supporter of privacy rights, and have supported legislation to prevent the proposed TIPS program from being created.

The TIPS program would have had Americans spying on one another. In addition, the new law prevents a national identification card.

My office is currently investigating the implementation of the new law to ensure that the privacy of citizens is not violated and that it does not violate an American's rights under the Constitution.

US APPLE AWARDS TOP HONOR TO NETHERCUTT

For the second consecutive session of Congress in a row, I have received a special award from the U.S. Apple Association for my work on issues important to American apple growers during the 107th Congress. The Golden Apple Award is given to members of Congress from apple-producing districts who support issues of economic importance to U.S. apple growers. I was one of only six House members to be recognized out of 143 districts, and I am especially proud to receive this award as the new representative of Okanogan County, a nationally prominent apple-producing region.

ON THE FLOOR

This week the House of Representatives adjourned for the year. The remaining Fiscal Year 2003 spending bills will be considered in the first session of the 108th Congress which begins in January.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

I always enjoy hearing from you. Please feel free to contact me if I can be of assistance to you in any matter. Here are some of the ways you may reach me, especially if you know of others who may want to receive this report each week:

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